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HUMAN RIGHTS

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FREEDOM FROM HUNGER: A HUMAN RIGHT

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims a broad range of birthrights to which everyone "as a member of society" is entitled. Basic to all of these, and entwined in all of them, is the right to food. As Adlai Stevenson said in 1952, "A hungry man is not a free man." Nor is a hungry child or woman free.

Humankind must be free from hunger if the right to vote, the right to freedom of choice and the right to democratic institutions are to have real meaning. Peace and prosperity, conservation of natural resources, promotion and protection of cultural heritage, cooperation and friendship on a universal scale will never find true expression unless basic means of survival are assured for all members of society. Freedom from hunger means effective access to food, which involves the right to productive resources, technology, appropriate institutions and markets. These must be assured without the gender bias that is commonplace in all walks of life.

As a follow-up to the 1974 World Food Conference, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was mandated to contribute to the realization of this basic objective–the right to food to which everyone is entitled, be they smallholder farmers, artisanal fishermen, landless labourers, nomadic pastoralists, ethnic indigenous populations or poor rural women. More than a billion people live in absolute poverty, unable to meet basic human needs, including the consumption of the minimum required calorie intake.

These men and women face a daily struggle to survive in the face of massive odds: mounting population pressures, accelerating degradation of the natural resource base on which their lives and livelihoods depend, the lack of basic productive inputs and support services and the scarcity of economic opportunities and credit. They are all too often constrained by policy biases, exploited by moneylenders, traders and petty officials and ignored by development planners. Women are especially vulnerable, for even more than poor rural men, they are subject to discrimination and their productive roles go unrecognized, undervalued and unsupported.

The right to food means that those who, despite their best efforts, are unable to produce enough food or earn enough income to buy food for themselves and their families must have access to the resources and support that will permit them to become more productive and to live lives of dignity. They need help to adopt improved, sustainable farming, livestock husbandry and fishery methods and environmental conservation measures. They need access to markets and credit and to off-farm employment opportunities. Only then will the right to food be more than a pious platitude.

Framework for development

The struggle against hunger and deprivation must be carried out within a coherent framework of development in which sustainable and equitable growth is pursued with the full participation of the poor. They have a right to choose and to contribute, and not just a claim to handouts as idle recipients of the benefits of development. This is why a new development paradigm is needed that will open the door for the poor to exercise their right to production, food and development. IFAD's interventions are fully consistent with the realization of this aspiration of the rural poor. Projects and programmes and specific instrumentalities are designed so that the poor can exercise their right to creativity and self-reliance, which will free them from the daily fear of not having enough to eat.

For the Fund the right to food involves:

- Access to land.

IFAD promotes land reform, land settlement and equitable access to communal property such as forest, pasture and wasteland.

- Access to water.

IFAD promotes the right to water through small-scale irrigation and water harvesting.

- Access to technology.

IFAD finances research for smallholder technology, demand-driven extension, development support, communication, training and skill development.

- Access to markets.

IFAD works to improve infrastructures and marketing policies.

- Access to credit.

IFAD designs delivery mechanisms suited to the needs and capacities of the rural poor.

- Ethno-development.

IFAD helps indigenous peoples build on their traditional technologies and social practices.

➢ Environmental conservation.

IFAD supports effective low-cost preservation and reclamation measures that are compatible with sustained immediate production.

➢ Institutional organization and mobilization.

IFAD encourages institution-building and collaboratory participation.

➢ Freedom from gender discrimination.

IFAD ensures that women are full and active partners in development and at the centre of development strategy implementation.

➢ Access to information.

IFAD provides the instruments for people to increase awareness and express their choices.

IFAD's work is part of a process, a search for sustainable grass-roots solutions which fit an overall development strategy designed to increase productivity and liberate untapped capacities across the board. Prices, markets, trade and fiscal policies impact directly on the poor, often creating disincentives for production, whether on-farm or off-farm. There is an objective need to adjust these policies so that the poor can effectively participate in promoting growth, stability and prosperity for all. This is why the Fund has joined so energetically to enhance the capacity of the poor to contribute to the process. It is also why "learning from the poor" is as important in the macro-context as it has proven to be at the grass-roots level to ensure household food security, which is IFAD's focus.

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